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# The Dispositif of Creativity & The Subjectification of the Creative Individual

## What the Creative Human Being can/cannot be

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### Abstract

Based on the work of primarily Michel Foucault, this article explores how the late-modern human being is incited to be a creative individual; which attitudes, actions, behavior and discourses the individual is inscribed with, and governed by. With reference to contemporary research on creativity, the article's focus will be on the discourse of creative learning, described in its contemporary appearance. Thus, the article scrutinizes the regularities of statements, which form the creative learning discourse, and discloses (some of) the norms and attitudes that shape and form the behavior of both the learning student and the lifelong learner and also, how they frame our ability to perceive, talk and understand ourselves in the context of a late-modern, and innovative society that emphasizes lifelong learning.

**Keywords** Foucault, Discourse, Dispositif, Power, Subjectification.

### Introduction

In this article I will apply an analytical-strategic approach to the description of the discourse on creative teaching and learning. Ac-

cordingly the basic question is, under which conditions a particular 'meaningfulness' regarding creative learning and teaching for creativity (e.g., a specific discourse) has been formed, how various and different perceptions has shaped our understanding of creativity, and under which conditions these constructions have come about (Åkerstrøm Andersen 1999, 13ff). Based on Foucault's concept of the dispositif<sup>1</sup>, I will describe how the European Commissions Joint Research Center (ECJRC) as a political, trans-governmental research-institution, the British Think-Tank 'Demos' and the Danish Professor Lene Tanggaard Pedersen, at different times and from different positions, participate in the formation of the discourse on creative teaching and learning / teaching for creativity. The article will describe in what particular direction the creative individuals are being inscribed - subjectified - with principles that come to work as their own subjection (Foucault 1975, p. 203). How their gestures, opinions, behavior, self-understanding and everyday talk is being oriented, modeled and controlled.

### **Foucault - discourse, power and subjectification**

Foucault defines genealogy as a "form of history, which can account for the constitution of knowledges, discourses, domains of objects, etc." (Foucault 1977, p. 117). It is a description of the procedures and mechanisms of power (Foucault 1978, pp. 7-8) that "produces things, (it) induces pleasure, forms knowledge (and) produces discourse" (Foucault 1977, p. 119). While genealogy is thus the temporal-longitudinal description of the constitution of knowledge and discourses, Foucault's archaeology is the temporal-latitudinal description of the rules, which at a given time and place define and regulate, what he calls the discursive formation: Its objects, enunciative modalities, concepts and strategies (Foucault 1968, 59ff; Foucault 1969, 34ff). It is a 'mapping' of the mechanisms and procedures: The dialectic relation between the regularity between a number of statements on one side and on the other side the rules regulating the formation of discourses<sup>2</sup> and that condition the existence of the regularity of statements.

By consistently referring to rules, mechanisms and procedures, Foucault manages to 'displace' the individual human being as the subject of the statements. Instead the subject is "a particular function [...]; an empty function, that can be filled by virtually any indi-

vidual when he formulates the statement" (Foucault 1969, p. 105), speaking from "a particular, vacant place that may in fact be filled by different individuals" (Ibid, p. 107). Furthermore, the function being particular emphasize, that the position is locked to a specific domain of knowledge, with mechanisms, rules and procedures that regulate and govern what the individual can say, when and where (Foucault 1969, p. 49 and 106; Foucault 1971, p. 13; Foucault 1976, p. 16). By using the term 'govern' Foucault distances himself from a deterministic understanding of power. Governing is the *direction*, not the determination of the conduct of the individual; it is the "action upon the actions of others" (Foucault 1982, p. 790) requiring free individuals who may, or may not, act accordingly (Ibid).

Once formatted, the knowledge and discourses engage in the formation of the heterogeneous ensemble that Foucault calls a dispositif which, besides discourses, consists of "institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions - in short, the said as much as the unsaid" (Foucault 1977A, p. 194). Supported by, and supporting, specific types of knowledge, it responds to an urgent need and plays a strategic function, with a capacity to "capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control or secure the gestures, behaviors, opinions or discourses of living beings" (Agamben 2006, p. 14). Therefore one of the main questions to answer is what the necessities are that link the various types of knowledge and statements together.

As elements - statements and conceptual formations - in the discourse on creative teaching and learning and/or teaching for creativity, scientific articles on the subject matter are de facto, at the same time elements in the dispositif on creativity. They form parts of the dispositif ensemble, and enter into this strategic 'ménage-a-infinité' with other elements, between which a "certain manipulation of relations of forces" (Foucault 1977A, p. 196) takes place and either develop them in a particular direction, or block, stabilize or utilize them. They are elements that at a given point in time, from a specific position, play a strategic role in the constitution of the dispositif which orient and determine, control and secure the attitudes, behavior, opinions and the everyday talk and self-understanding of living human beings - in this particular case, as *creative* and *learning* individuals.

## Methodology and data selection

An endless number of publications on creative teaching and teaching for creativity have been published. Thus, the selection of data is selective. Yet it is neither random nor accidental. By selecting texts from a national, policy-influencing think tank, from an independent, EU in-house scientific institution and a leading Danish and international researcher<sup>3</sup> (spanning the years from 1999 – 2013), I have chosen texts produced by individuals that take up a particular vacant place, and play a particular function, due to the institutional sites and settings, from where they speak (Foucault 1969, pp. 55 - 57).

Furthermore, these texts are of particular interest due to the fact that they format a discourse on creative teaching and teaching for creativity that has direct impact on the political decisions on education and learning and thus the subjectification of children in not only the Danish School System, but across the entire European Community. How our children come to think of and understand themselves and each other will significantly impact the way that our schools, workplaces and families are established and organized in the future; which behavior and attitudes will be regarded as valuable and acceptable, and which not; which statements are considered to be reasonable and meaningful, and which are “considered null and void” (Foucault 1971, p. 14). The discursive-dispositional analysis can be illustrated as follows:

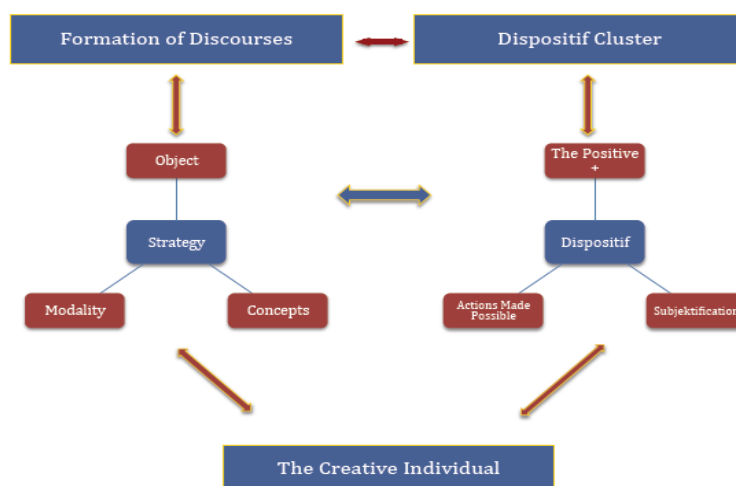


Figure 1. The Discursive-Dispositional Analytical-Strategic Model (Mølholm 2013, p. 228).

Identifying the strategy (see above diagram) is the cornerstone of the analysis. In the present article, the strategy of globalization is the urgent need to which the strategy of teaching for creativity and creative teaching is the response. A number of statements from the articles and the book analyzed in this article are then linked together in order to show how they together format the discourse on the creative human being and how these discourses are subjectifying the late-modern human being to be creative. This is done by pointing to various attitudes, perceptions, understandings and ways of behaving as positive and desirable (the Positive+), and others and opposite as undesirable (the Negative-), thereby rendering certain actions possible and likely.

### **An urgent need for creativity**

In my research I have substantiated the globalization-discourse as the driving force, urging the Danish workers to become lifelong learners, developing both their personal and their vocational skills and competencies, by describing globalization as both a threat and an opportunity (Mølholm 2013, pp. 245-282. See also Fairclough, 2009). As a consequence of the globalization of society, Danish (as well as European) citizens are to an increasing degree urged to become lifelong learners (EU-Commission 2000A, EU-Commission 2000B, EU-Commission 2001, European Parliament 2006), in order to contribute to the “development of the community as an advanced knowledge-based society, with sustainable economic development, more and better jobs and greater social cohesion” (European Parliament 2006, Chapter 1, Article 1.2). Knowledge is the ‘new’ cornerstone and “primary resource of the new economy” (Bentley & Seltzer 1999, p. 1) in a world that is “constantly ‘in the making’” (Tinggaard 2013, p. 23), and the lifelong learning individuals have to be able to apply what they learn, in new and creative ways (Tinggaard 2011, p. 219), whereby they become “less vulnerable in the global economy” (EU-Commission 2000B, p. 11). The ECJRC sums it all up by concluding, that creativity is essential, both to the enhancement of innovation, as well as the development of personal and occupational competences and the well-being of the individual (Cachia, Ferrari, Ala-Mutka & Punie 2010, p. 14).

The Positive+ (plus) of the Globalization- and the Creative Learning Discourses come to function as landmarks, with *action markers*



- creativity, innovation and development - inciting the individual to hold a specific set of attitudes and opinions, perform certain actions and adhere to a specific discourse. They hold out the prospects that Europe will (once again) become an advanced, knowledge-based society, with more and better jobs, greater social cohesion and a sustainable economic development. Creativity is highlighted as a primary skill in order to ensure innovation, which is a key component in economic growth and a sustainable economy. Furthermore creativity is essential in the pursuit of an enhanced productivity and the ensuring of social welfare.

At the same time, these positive landmarks allow us the possibility to sense and determine the Negative- (minus): what they at the same time make impossible (Foucault 1966, p. 342). If individuals fail to obtain creative skills and the ability to use what they learn, in new and creative ways, they will first and foremost be more vulnerable in the new, global economy and risk "marginalization, (being) among those who lack the means or motivation to acquire marketable knowledge" (Bentley & Seltzer 1999, p. 2). The new and better jobs will be beyond their reach, they will lose their competitiveness and the prospect of maintaining their employability will diminish accordingly. To the society, failing to teach for creativity will result in the loss of competitiveness and a sustainable, economic development. The social consequences of such a development are diminished social cohesion and social welfare, and ultimately negative effects on the well being of the individuals.

Thus individual citizens as well as the political decision-makers, teachers, educators and employers are subjectified to permanent learning, and to apply what they learn in new and creative ways. They are subjectified to perceive and understand creative teaching and teaching for creativity as a source to further and future prosperity, and as a vehicle for social development, greater social cohesion and social welfare.

### Teaching for creativity

Whilst the globalization puts pressure on the welfare-society, as we know it today and threatens the jobs of thousands, it simultaneously implies an opportunity for growth: in the quantity and quality of jobs, in the economy and in society as a whole. The lever to realize these opportunities is, as mentioned above, creativity. And



the means to make creativity a reality is to teach for creativity and creative teaching. Thus the lifelong learning individual, the teachers and educators, business managers and political decision-makers are incited with norms, attitudes, opinions and discourses, subjectifying them to be creative and apply what they know and learn, in new and creative ways, which again is considered to be one of the main sources for innovation.

Tanggaard, as well as Cachia et al., perceive creativity as an almost innate ability (Cachia, Ferrari, Ala-Mutka & Punie 2010, p. 9; Tanggaard 2013, p. 23 and 29). With the Positive+ being constant and continuous development, change, modification, transformation and renewing, the Negative- is everything representing a repetition or retaining of something 'old': The familiar, the known and the things we consider being obvious or that we take for granted. It is the disposition - incitement - of a creative, lifelong learning individual who "crosses divides, discovers new countries and moves through unknown terrain" (Tanggaard 2013, p. 29) and makes us appreciate and value what is new and different (Ibid, p. 27). As such, the creative learner is subjectified with an 'entrepreneurial' attitude, to life as well as to learning, the two being un-separable.

In addition, the creative individual is capable of discovering "new problems when others may not even be asking any questions at all" (Bentley & Seltzer 1999, p. 19), and he is able to formulate new problems, transfer learning between different contexts, and understands that learning involves making mistakes and being focused on the pursuit of a specific goal (Ibid; Tanggaard 2011, p. 221).

The disposition of the creative human being is not only a subjectification of creativity but as it turns out, also a subjectification of *how* to be creative. The question is not, *if* every human being is creative or has a creative potential, but *how* this potential is realized. This underlying understanding seems for example to be the case in the article 'Stories about creative teaching and productive learning', where the overall theme is, how "teachers teach for creativity" and ask the teachers to "specify, how they recognize creativity among pupils" (Tanggaard 2011, p. 223). The assumption (not the question) seems to be *that* (not *if*) the teachers teach for creativity, and *that* (not *if*) they are focused on detecting the students' creative potential.

These questions incite the teachers to be teaching for creativity, and to look for signs of creativity, so as to be able to unfold it in the

pupils' learning-process. In order to do so they must themselves be creative and be sympathetic to the idea of experimenting with their own teaching, so as to create the best conditions for the students' development of their creative skills (Ibid, p. 220). Through dialogue, the students will find their own ways to address and solve problems in innovative manners (Ibid, p. 230). Likewise, the heads of the schools must be able to inspire and convince the students and teachers to pursue their ideas (Tanggaard 2013, p. 27).

As a result, both the student and the teacher are subjectified with a willingness to take risks, to be curious and adventurous, to hold an open mind, experiment with new ideas and to pursue new solutions. The creative, learning individual is subjectified with the courage to challenge the existing order, as a precondition to be able to come up with new ideas and ways of handling the situation he is facing, in a world that is "constantly in the making, requiring numerous adjustments, improvisations and innovations, both exceptional and mundane" (Tanggaard 2013, p. 23). Furthermore the creative individual is expected to be a "complete human-being" (Graversen & Larsen 2004, p. 344) subjectified as socially engaged, committed, persuasive and full of initiative.

The disposition of the students, teachers and head of schools rest though, on the choices made by the political decision-makers, who must make it a political priority. They must come to understand the

distinction between the creative teacher [...] and the teacher who is obliged to teach according to a manual. [...]. When teaching according to the manual, following specified tasks, obligations and rules, it is possible to raise pupils' scores. Nevertheless, it becomes less likely that the teaching will challenge pupils who are able to go beyond the framework of the test. [...], such teaching methods become a barrier to creativity [...] (Tanggaard 2011, pp. 220 - 221).

Not only do the decision-makers have to learn to distinguish between the creative teacher and the conformist teacher. They must also learn to see the differences as insurmountable: that the conformist teaching is the Negative-, representing an obstacle to creativity that can only be overcome if national tests control and sur-

veillance is replaced with a higher degree of trust (as the implicit, Positive+) (Tanggaard 2011, p. 221). It is a subjectification of the political decision-makers to be courageous enough to trust the teachers and learners, and to hold an open mind, valuing confrontation and critique as necessary sources to innovations, which again are indispensable in the endeavor to preserve and develop our welfare-society.

### Ramifications

The understanding and depicting of creativity as an everyday phenomenon and an ability that every human being possesses implies that the absence of creativity in the learning-process (individually or socially) is a result of insufficient conditions due to a lack of understanding and priority with the political decision-makers, rather than a deficiency in the individual learner. Tanggaard distances herself from the otherwise common understanding of creativity as exceptional and a demonstration of an unusual and particular high order thinking, praising the few at the expense of the many who lack imagination (Tanggaard 2013, p. 28). In line with Cachia et al., Tanggaard maintains the point of view that it is ultimately a matter of how teachers and decision-makers facilitate the learning-processes and conditions to learn that decides, whether the learning individual develops his or her creative potential (Tanggaard 2011, p. 220), while organizing the learning-process in thematic- and project-oriented work gives the pupils an opportunity to “gain access to an experience of creative learning” (Ibid, p. 228). Thereby she represents a different approach to, and understanding of, the risk of marginalization that Bentley and Seltzer who claim that it is ultimately a matter of means and motivation, whether the creative potential is unfolded.

Nevertheless, the end result seems to be the same: *if* sufficient conditions and opportunities are provided, and the proper means and motivation is given, it is, by and large, up to the learning individuals themselves whether they decide to pursue and realize their potential and get one of the many and better jobs, obtain economic and social prosperity, etc. In other words, success or failure is ultimately their own achievement and responsibility. When it is “just as creative for someone to find a new means of baking bread as it is for a professor of mathematics to discover a new algebra” (Tang-

gaard 2013, p. 29), there is no excuse not to be creative. Thus it becomes a norm, attitude and action we are all expected to adopt and conduct, in whatever situation and field we are situated, whether it be a bakery or a university. In this kind of individualized society, where everyone is disposed to unleash their creative potential, the individual's biography becomes their own responsibility (Beck 1986, p. 216). They must "learn to understand themselves (himself) as the center of events; [...]" (Beck 1986, p. 217, author's translation. See also Korsgaard 1999, p. 195ff). They can either adapt or perish. The message seems to be: if creativity is 'the new black', wear it and adapt, or refuse it and be inapt.

The consequences are substantial. First and foremost the attitudes, understandings, behavior and values that are not coinciding with 'the new black', have a tendency to be held null and void, and a person who does not comply with the norms and values of the creative life, to be perceived as a fool (Foucault 1971, p. 14). By celebrating the individual who is bold and adventurous and not afraid of confronting and criticizing the established systems and institutions and who is persuasive and comfortable when presenting something new, the society risks marginalizing or excluding those who are not like this individual.

## Conclusion

The selection and installation of a difference between 'this' (the Positive+, the solid, positive and full forms) and 'all the other' (the Negative-), is necessary for a society to make decisions and move forward (Luhmann 1997, p. 92). But at the same time, these selections of differences make us blind: "blind to ourselves as observers, blind to the unit of difference with which we observe, blind to other differences, that we *could* have observed with, and blind to the world as a whole" (Thyssen 2000, pp. 13-14, author's translation). With a strong focus on the development of creative and innovative competencies, we become weak-sighted and less able to realize the potential consequences of the decisions we make: The marginalization and exclusion of those who are *not* adventurous, who are *not* bold and comfortable in a big crowd, and performing his or her best in the midst of a group, who appreciates continuity and stability, and to whom constant development and renewing is *not* associated with 'the meaning of life'.

The consideration for the well-being of each and every child, as stated by the Department of Education in the introduction to the Danish School Reform ([www.uvm.dk](http://www.uvm.dk), 2014), not to say “the well-being of all individuals in society” (Cachia et al 2010, p. 14) suggest an ethical imperative to treat every citizen not just as a means to an end, but as a purpose in itself (Kant 1785, pp. 76-77). But based on the analysis of this article it rather seems as if economic growth and development are the imperative suggesting that we as society silently accept the utilitarian premise of “the greatest amount of happiness altogether” (Mill 1861, p. 19), and the well-being for as many as possible, but not necessarily for all. We are yet to have this debate regarding our school system in particular and our society - not least the places where we work - in general. Failure does not seem to be an option in the world of today, but it is nonetheless a painful reality to many.

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## Notes

- 1 I use the term of French origin *dispositif*, instead of the English translation of the term, *apparatus*. The reason for this is, that the term apparatus recur in a number of various, scientific theories which are in many ways both incompatible and incommensurable with Foucault's term *dispositif*, i.e. Karen Barad's Agential Realism.
- 2 For an elaborate discussion of whether to describe the regularity of statements as a discursive formation or a formation of discourses, see Mølholm, Martin (2013), p. *What we talk about, when we talk about work*, pp. 220-222.
- 3 In 1997 The British Think Tank 'Demos' was labeled "the most influential think tank in Britain" (The Economist 1997, October 23<sup>rd</sup>), with one of its co-funders being a leading member of the then British PM Tony Blair's policy units and with research and ideas carried out and laid forward by Demos "cropping up in the speeches of Mr. Blair" (ibid). The European Commissions Joint Research Center function as "the commissions in-house science service", with a mission to "provide EU policies with independent, evidence-based scientific and technical support throughout the whole policy cycle" (<https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/about>). And the Danish Professor Lene Tanggaard is one of the leading Danish researchers in creative teaching/teaching for creativity.